

#### Step 4 – 02-03-09

This week I'd like to continue my story of how we set up the Party for the Animals. On taking up our first seats in the Dutch parliament, numerous commentators made jokes about "dogs and cats" in the Lower House. They accused us of "moral superiority" and politicians from other parties never missed an opportunity to lecture us that "there can be no politics without compromise".

Historian Maartje Janse wrote about this development in one of the Netherlands' leading newspapers, *De Volkskrant*, on 6 January 2007 in an article entitled "Animal party challenges the political establishment". She drew a strong comparison between the politics of the Party for the Animals (the so-called "expressive style" of politics) and the 19th-century "abolitionist" organisations she has described in her research. Unlike philanthropic institutions, these organisations, working for the abolition of vivisection, slavery or alcohol abuse or fighting for the rights of women, became active on the political stage. Convincing the public to take a stand against a wrong then required three main things: an approach grounded in science, an appeal to people's conscience and sense of morality and an ability to arouse feelings of compassion and outrage in the face of atrocity. Time and again, they argued that the greater good had to transcend all other differences.

"History teaches us that there is certainly a place in the political landscape for the expressive style of the Party for the Animals and that it appeals to many," according to Maartje Janse. There are people who believe that the Party for the Animals disqualifies itself as a serious contender in the political arena by its self-declared moral superiority, which betrays a over-simplified, black-and-white view of the world – good against evil – and a simplistic conception of politics. "This conception of (good) politics that these critics implicitly refer to is limited to what sociologist Frank Parkin calls "instrumental politics": engaging in the game of negotiation to reach compromises and enact new legislation. This rejects "expressive politics": the expression of personal outrage at injustices. But if there is one thing that today's politicians have come to understand post-Pim Fortuyn, it is that the instrumental politics characteristic of liberal and social-democratic governments actually alienates people from politics. There needs to be room for citizens to voice their opinions and feelings.

She continues: "The claim by Marianne Thieme that her party is following in the footsteps of the anti-slavery movement and the movement for women's rights is a political statement that suggests the future success and moral infallibility of the Party for the Animals. Yet, my recent research into the Dutch movements for the abolition of, among other things, slavery and alcohol abuse show historical parallels with the rise of the Party for the Animals. From 1840, concerned citizens organised themselves into various single-issue groups to press home their demands for an end to the suffering of slaves, the children of drunkards and the Javanese. From the outset, these "abolitionists" were ridiculed. Anyone who abstained from hard liquor as a way of taking a stance against the social problem of alcohol abuse was derided and ran the risk of losing their social status."



Next week I'll continue with part 2 of Maartje Janse's analysis. Till then!